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ABSTRACT

Current models of acculturation and cultural identity are primarily devoted to identifying the course or the levels at which it takes place, but they are severely limited in describing how a sense of self is fashioned out of multiple social and cultural contexts. The acculturative process is impacted, for example, by the reasons for immigration, the historical period during which the immigration occurred, education and socioeconomic levels, family functioning, and social support. All these factors make direct comparisons between ethnic groups of limited value, but many of the psychological processes underlying acculturation are assumed to be similar across various ethnic minority groups. Current understanding of how different individuals go through the process of change in their behavior, attitude, and identity as they come in contact with different cultural context has not been studied adequately. An alternative research paradigm is needed to investigate the changing sense of self in the lives in Korean American women, The narrative approach using a collective or multiple case study method is suggested as a way to understand how individuals interpret various occurrence in their lives and how they form meaning and personal identity from these experiences. (Contains 50 references.) (GCP)

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Running head: IDENTITY OF KOREAN AMERICAN WOMEN

Acculturation and Identity of Korean American Women

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Abstract

There is a general sense in the field that culture undergirds human values, motivation, and behavior, but how much and in what ways culture influences an individual's self and experience is hotly debated. Current models of acculturation and cultural identity is primarily devoted to identifying the course or the levels at which it takes place, but they are severely limited in describing how a sense of self is fashioned out of multiple social and cultural contexts. The acculturative process is impacted, for example, by the reasons for immigration, the historical period during which the immigration occurred, education and socioeconomic levels, family functioning, and social support. All these factors make direct comparisons between ethnic groups of limited value, but many of the psychological processes underlying acculturation are assumed to be similar across various ethnic minority groups. Moreover, typological attempts to categorize the complex phenomenon of acculturation and cultural identity have been very limiting because they overlook the central role individuals play in choosing whatever change occurs through contact between differing cultural orientations and life situations. Thus, current understanding of how different individuals go through the process of change in their behavior, attitude, and identity as they come in contact with different cultural context has not been studied adequately. An alternative research paradigm is needed to investigate the changing sense of self in the lives of Korean American women. The narrative approach using a collective or multiple case study method is suggested as a way to understand how individuals interpret various occurrence in their lives and how they form meaning and personal identity from these experiences.

Acculturation and Identity of Korean American Women

Introduction

There is a general sense in the field that culture undergirds human values, motivation, and behavior, but how much and in what ways culture influences an individual's self and identity are hotly debated. Current models of acculturation and cultural identity is primarily devoted to identifying the stages or the levels at which it takes place, but they do not adequately describe how a sense of self is fashioned out of multiple social and cultural contexts. Typological attempts to categorize the complex phenomenon of acculturation and cultural identity have been very limiting because they overlook the central role individuals play in choosing whatever change that may occur when coming in contact with different cultural orientations and life situations. Thus, the current understanding of how individuals go through the process of change in their behavior, attitude, and identity as they come in contact with different cultural context has not been studied adequately. An alternative paradigm is needed to understand the changing sense of self in the lives of Korean American women. The narrative approach is suggested as a way to understand how individuals living in a dual cultural context make meaning and form personal identity out of many ambiguous and even contradictory values and life experiences.

Acculturation and Cultural Identity

Acculturation occurs when at least two cultural groups come in contact and a process of change in values, attitudes and behaviors takes place (Phinney, 1990). In principle, some change may result in either of the two groups, but it has been noted that,

in practice, the majority group tends to contribute more to the flow of the cultural change (Padilla, 1980). It is also commonly assumed that the stages of minority identity development are mediated by the generational status in the United States—immigrants being socio-culturally closer to their home culture than to the country-of-adoption and every successive generation born and raised in the United States becoming more acculturated to the mainstream culture (Ibrahim, Ohnishi, & Sandhu, 1997). Beside the length of residence, the age of arrival in the U.S. also plays an important role in the cultural adaptation process (Berry, 1990).

In the last couple of decades, acculturation has emerged as one of the more frequently cited within-group differences in counseling literature (Padilla & Lindholm, 1984; Helms, 1989; Atkinson, Morten & D. W. Sue, 1993; Ponterotto, Baluch, & Carielli, 1998). Much of this literature is devoted to measuring and identifying the type and degree of cultural adaptation in different ethnic groups (Olmedo, 1979; Cuellar, Harris, & Jasso, 1980; Suinn, Rickard-Figueroa, Lew, & Vigil, 1987) and how it is related to various counseling variables (Atkinson & Gim, 1989; Atkinson, Whiteley, & Gim, 1990; Atkinson & Matsushita, 1991; Tata & Leong, 1994). A notable problem in this area of study is definitional ambiguities between acculturation and cultural identity which has led to much confusion in the field (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993).

Chung (1996) describes five models of cultural adaptation which have been commonly applied to acculturation and ethnic identity. First, the assimilation model, the earliest model of cultural adaptation, is a unidirectional model which assumes that individuals will move away from the culture of origin which is thought of as inferior to the dominant American culture. Second, the bipolar model is unidimensional in that both

cultures are conceptualized on a single dimension, but it is bidirectional in that the two cultures are seen as equally desirable options. This model, however, considers biculturality as being in the middle between the two polarities which means that movement toward one culture comes at the expense of the other, creating an either-or dynamic. The Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (SL-ASIA; Suinn et al., 1987), which is the most cited measure of acculturation for the Asian American group, is based on the bipolar model. Third, the multidimensional model views cultural change taking place in multiple domains at different rates, but this model holds the same linear assumptions as the bipolar model. Fourth, the transcultural model suggested by Sue & Sue (1971) defines biculturality as a unique synthesis of different cultures forming a new identity, but one of the critiques of this model is that an integration of disparate cultures may be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Finally, the orthogonal model proposed by Oetting and Beauvais (1991) is multidimensional and conceptualizes biculturality as having a strong independent identification with both cultures. Although this model takes the contextual nature of behavior into consideration, an inherent danger of this model is that an individual may become too flexible and situational to the point that any sense of cohesive self may be lacking.

Each of these models of acculturation and cultural identity attempts to codify a very complex phenomenon, but they are severely limited in describing how a sense of self is fashioned out of multiple social and cultural contexts. For example, the reasons for immigration, the historical period during which the immigration occurred, educational and socioeconomic levels, family functioning, and social support all impact and vary the process of cultural adaptation (Padilla, 1980; Berry, 1990). These factors make direct

comparisons between ethnic groups of limited value, but many of the psychological processes underlying acculturation are assumed to be similar across various ethnic minorities. For instance, what is generally assumed about Korean Americans' acculturation and cultural identity is based on research conducted with Asian Americans as a whole even though the generalizability of these findings to Korean Americans is unknown (Chung, 1996).

In addition, typological attempts to categorize the complex process of acculturation and cultural identity have been very limiting because they overlook the central role individuals play in creating necessary changes as they come in contact with different cultural values and life situations. Polkinghorne (1988) states that the emergent properties of the human realm produce "inconsistent patterns of response across individuals and promote within the same person innovative and creative responses over time to the same stimulus" (p. 114). Therefore, the current understanding of how different individuals go through the process of change and how their identity evolves as they come into contact with different cultural contexts has not been studied adequately.

Traditional vs. Narrative Approach on Self and Identity

The problem of overlooking human variability and agency is not limited to acculturation literature but is much more endemic to the field. Since Erikson (1959) popularized the concept of "life cycle" and "identity," many social scientists have attempted to theorize about adult development in terms of predictable stages (Levinson, 1978; Gould, 1980; Gutmann, 1987). Some psychologists (Gergen, 1982; Polkinghorne,1991; Mahoney,1991), however, have been pointing out that these efforts to account for stability and ordered change in human lives have been largely unsuccessful

because people possess a multiplicity of potentially contradictory concepts of self. This view is supported by recent discoveries in cognitive science which suggest that we have no single, monolithic, consistent way of structuring our inner lives but have a system of different metaphorical conceptions of our internal structure (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

In spite of the variability inherent in human beings, psychology as a discipline has adopted the natural science approach developed to measure invariant physical objects (Polkinghorne, 1991). As a result, psychology in general and the studies of self in particular have been severely limited to quantitative methods designed for mapping out "a mathematical pattern of relationship among predefined categories and analyzing the comparative instances within those categories" (p. 181). Human lives, however, are much too complex for a typological approach. Polkinghorne and Gribbons (1998) suggest that "human actions, unlike physical objects, cannot be understood simply by examining their relationship to observable variable," but the individual's reasons and motivations for the action must be considered (p. 115).

Thus, if human science is to respect the wealth and variety of human life and understand how people interpret various occurrences in their lives, Polkinghorne (1983) suggests that an alternative paradigm intended for the study of the human realm is needed. Specifically, he proposes that narrative is the way we can understand human actions, events, and happenings (Polkinghorne, 1988). It assumes that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds and is interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed about their sense of the world and their experiences. The narrative form is particularly suitable in situations in which: (1) it is difficult to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context because they are so

embedded in the situation, and (2) it is important to understand the process to discover context characteristics that will shed light on an issue or object. Because the narrative account focuses on understanding social situations in their context without previously defined parameters, it is particularly appropriate for examining multiple and complex issues in cross-cultural settings.

Of the two ways in which human beings understand the world—paradigmatic and narrative, the psychologist Jerome Bruner (1990) also indicates that the narrative mode is meant to explain human events. The paradigmatic mode of thought, which relies on tightly reasoned analyses, logical proof, and empirical observation to comprehend experience, is unable to make much sense of human intentions and ambiguities in spite of all its precision. The narrative mode of thought, on the other hand, naturally seeks to understand human desires, needs, and goals in terms of stories and, hence, is better suited to explain human actions and motivations. Expanding on this view, McAdams (1993) adds that human experience is storied because people tend to understand human actions as organized in time and comprehended time in terms of stories:

> When we comprehend our actions over time, we see what we do in terms of a story. We see obstacles confronted, and intentions realized and frustrated over time. As we move forward from yesterday to today to tomorrow, we move through tensions building to climaxes, climaxes giving way to denouements, and tensions building again as we continue to move and change. Human time is a storied affair (p. 30).

Personal Identity: Narrative of the Self

Because the experience of self is organized along the temporal dimension and human beings tend to comprehend time in terms of stories, Polkinghorne (1988) proposes that narrative is the main way in which people form meaning and personal identity. He

explains, "we achieve our personal identities and self concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story" (p. 150). In fact, he suggests, being human is all about "meaning-generating activity" where an ongoing sequence of events are linked together through a plot to form a single, meaningful and coherent life story. Thus, he states, "the self is a concept defined as the expressive process of human existence, whose form is narrativity" (p. 151).

McAdams (1993) shares a similar view that each of us comes to know who we are by creating a heroic story of the self. He states,

> We each seek to provide our scattered and often confusing experiences with a sense of coherence by arranging the episodes of our lives into stories. This is not the stuff of delusion or self-deception. We are not telling ourselves lies. Rather, through our personal myths, each of us discovers what is true and what is meaningful in life. In order to live well, with unity and purpose, we compose a heroic narrative of the self that illustrates essential truths about ourselves (p. 11).

He calls this special story people develop to form their identity a "personal myth" which "each of us naturally constructs to bring together the different parts of ourselves and our lives into a purposeful and convincing whole" (p. 12). This "myth," he indicates, is a psychological structure inside the mind which evolves slowly over time and infuses life with unity and purpose. Storytellers by nature, he believes, we are born with a "narrating mind" designed to gather material to form the story from birth.

According to McAdams (1993), the personal myth develops from infancy to old age. The kinds of experiences we have in the first two years of life affect the narrative tone of our story—a set of unconscious and nonverbal "attitudes" about self and the world—which comes to shape our expectations about life and myth. In early childhood

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(i.e., preschool years), people begin to generate and collect the images which become the raw material for the personal myth that will be created in adult years. The imagery and the narrative tone from childhood, he notes, together "shape our understanding of who we are and how we fit into the adult world" (McAdams, 1993, p. 65).

Next, in late childhood (i.e., elementary-school years), children begin to develop a story theme and is able to see "how human behavior—in stories and in life—is organized by internal intentions played out over time" (McAdams, 1993, p. 67). Two primary themes of human motivation, according to McAdams, are *agency* (i.e., strivings for power, autonomy, independence, status, and rich experiences) and *communion* (i.e., strivings for love, intimacy, interdependence, acceptance, and interpersonal experiences). During adolescence, we begin to think of our own life in terms of a story and, hence, develop an identity for the first time. A central issue during the teenage years is formulating a person's ideology which "provides a backdrop of belief and value upon which the plot of his or her particular life story can unfold" (McAdams, 1993, p. 67). McAdams explains, "ideology concerns questions of goodness and truth. In order to know who I am, I must first decide what I believe to be true and good, false and evil about the world in which I live" (p. 81).

From adolescence onward, McAdams (1993) states that the formation and reformation of identity remains the central psychosocial task of the adult years. In fact, he believes adulthood is all about making life into myth. In the twenties and thirties, young adults must make provisional commitments and consolidate many roles. He suggests that creating and refining the main characters or imagoes which pulls together different social roles and other divergent aspects of the self are challenges faced by young

adults. Finally, adults in the middle years (i.e., forties and fifties) must reassess and revise their life story in ways that their identity becomes more integrative with a sense of unity and purpose. Therefore, McAdams believes that a mature life story or a "good" personal myth must contain following six qualities: (1) coherence, (2) openness (i.e., tolerates ambiguity, flexible and resilient), (3) credibility, (4) differentiation (i.e., richer, deeper, and more complex characterization, plot, and theme), (5) reconciliation, and (6) generative integration (i.e., integrating the mythmaker into society in a generative way).

Korean American Women's Identity and the Making of the Self

Raw Material: Traditional Images of Korean Women

According to McAdams (1993), "identity is something of a collaboration between the person and the social world. The two are together responsible for the life story" (p. 95). One area where the society plays a powerful role in the individual's identity development process is the making of images. Imagery, which is gathered in early childhood and serves as the raw material for forming a personal myth in adulthood, is largely obtained through culture. McAdams explains,

> Like our very identities, imagery is both discovered and made. To a certain extent, children, as well as adults, make their own images. But the nature of the making is strongly dependent on the available raw materials, and the raw materials are to be discovered in and through culture. Each culture provides its members with a vast but finite catalog of images. Every person is exposed to and draws upon parts of the catalog in a unique way. Therefore, every member of a culture is unique in some way, at least as far as his or her personal imagery is concerned. Still, differences between cultures can be considered, for even in their uniqueness members of one culture share common imagery and may, as a group, differ in important ways from members of a different culture. (p. 60).

Thus, in order to understand Korean American women's identity, it is critical to explore the common cultural imagery these women grew up with in Korea and/or in the Korean

immigrant community in the U.S. Specifically, two powerful sources of imagery—family and religion—need to be carefully scrutinized to gain a better understanding of images that have molded Korean women's life stories.

Family. Because family is the primary way cultural images are transmitted in childhood, McAdams (1993) suggests that family plays a major role in exposing and shaping many of the lasting images which are most often unconsciously incorporated into a person's myth in adult years. As the foundation of society, family is the basic building-block from which more elaborate social structures arise. However, according to Connell (1987), family is not the simplest, but in reality one of the most complex social institutions in that, "in no other institution are relationships so extended in time, so intensive in contact, so dense in their interweaving of economics, emotion, power and resistance" (p. 121).

In contemporary Korea, the Confucian view of social and family order which upholds the family-centered system is deeply etched in people's consciousness and life style (A. R. Kim, 1996). Because the establishment and maintenance of good order in the family was regarded as the primary means of safeguarding security and stability in society, a clear hierarchy between the sexes was believed to be imperative for the proper functioning of the human order (Deuchler, 1992). Just as heaven (*yang*) dominates earth (*yin*), male superiority and precedence over female was viewed as cosmologically sanctioned. Accordingly, during the Neo-Confucian transformation of Korea in the Yi dynasty (1392-1910),

> the social principle, *namjon yobi*, "Men should be respected; women should be lowered," which was derived from the Confucian belief in hierarchy, functioned

> as the leading ethical principle, while *hyonmo yangch'o* (wise mother-good wife) became the motto for women's role performance (Kim, 1996, p. 6).

Thus, the view that the law of nature accorded the woman in a subordinate, dependent position to a man was commonly accepted, and she was expected to follow the Rule of Three Obedience or *samjong chidok* (obedience to father, obedience to husband, and obedience to son) throughout her lifetime.

According to Kim (1996), the direct consequence of the everyday practice of these Confucian gendered precepts was that Yi women developed "self-in-the-family" consciousness or collective identities with their men and families because that was the women's primary means of survival and fulfillment. She explains that

> role-performance elevated the image of a woman's self. However, the self was other-oriented: a woman lived for men, children, and the family; she could not separate her own identity from those of their husbands and children. One could argue that their social selves became their subjective selves, their own "I"s, that they represented the patriarchy of the Yi society (p. 16).

The Neo-Confucian movement during the Choson dynasty, therefore, thoroughly indoctrinated ascendance of family and familial solidarity over individual rights and interests. The idea of familism, which truly became the national ethic by the middle of the seventeenth century, remains strong in spite of modern Western influences, urbanization, and industrialization in Korea even today (Kim, 1996).

Religion. Religion is another important source of imagery which helps people form "implicit understandings of what is good and true and what their relation to an ultimate cosmos is" regardless of a child's or a family's religious background (McAdams, 1993, p. 61). Max Weber (1958) has well illustrated how religion shapes an individual's consciousness, lifestyle, and identity in the Western society. Korean women's self and

identity are also intimately linked with religion. Specifically, Shamanism has played a large role in Korean women's consciousness and self-image in spite of its status historically as the "other" religion (Kim, 1996).

Under the Neo-Confucian transformation of Korea during the Yi dynasty (1392-1910), Confucianism became the official state religion and women were removed from ritual duties as the ancestor worship was performed exclusively by men (Deuchler, 1992). Shamanism which was the indigenous religion of Korea, on the other hand, became the religion of women and "just as shamans served as village priestesses, women in general functioned as household priestesses" (Kim, 1996, p. 23). During this period, women were prohibited from going outside of their private quarters, and the home functioned as the main Shamanistic sanctuary. A woman's ritualistic worship of the house gods, known as *kosa*, in offering food and prayers on behalf of the family was believed to be intimately tied to the success or failure of that household.

Through Shamanistic rituals and observances, the average woman's self became identified with that of divinity or the spirits which molded the image of "common woman into a 'woman warrior,' one who would by any and all means avail, stake out, defend, assert, and promote the well-being of her family" (Kim, 1996, p. 24). This was a powerful image of a woman, but it was basically rooted in the "inner quarters"—well within the ideal of dutifully serving the family. Even though Shamanism empowered a Korean woman to function as a "warrior-like" household priestess, it was still in the service of others, namely praying for protection and blessing for her family members. In this way, self-sacrifice became a core of woman's virtue since the Yi dynastry and her self was always directed towards others; she could not separate her own identity from

those of her husband, children, and the family. Thus, Kim (1996) states, "Confucianism commanded and Shamanism reinforced women's view of themselves as other-oriented and selfless being, who lived vicariously" for others (p. 24).

Setting: Traditional Confucian Ideology

According to McAdams (1993), a person's ideology, which locates the personal myth within a particular ethical, religious, and epistemological "time and place," functions as a "setting" for identity to develop in adolescence. He explains,

> In order to fashion a self-defining personal myth, each of us must also come to some implicit conclusions about the meaning of the world, so that our identities may be anchored by ideological truths. Furthermore, like identity, ideology is something with which we wrestle in a social context. The social environment in which we live and mature shapes the development of our basic beliefs and values (p. 84).

For example, in the western hemisphere, Protestant work ethics have been largely credited for shaping people's thinking and behavior (Weber, 1958). Confucian teachings, in a like manner, have profoundly influenced the development of Korean people's consciousness and lifestyles. In contemporary Korea, the family-centered Confucian ideology has done more to obscure women's identity and development of self-consciousness than any other system of thought (Yoon, 1986; Moon, 1998).

The traditional Confucian practices have similarly played a significant role in shaping the identity of Korean women living in America today. Studies on Korean immigrant families in the U.S. indicate that the traditional Korean view deeply rooted in Confucianism continues to be the single most influential force shaping family structure, gender roles, and marital relations in spite of greater exposure to Western egalitarian values (Moon, 1998; Min, 1998; Lim, 1997). In fact, Kibria (1993) suggests that

immigrants typically draw on premigration family experiences and ideologies as they adapt to the structural context of the new "host" society. Thus, in order to understand the forces that impact Korean American women's life stories, it would be first helpful to examine the historical background prior to the post-1965 exodus of Korean migration to America. Next, a closer look at two areas in Korean immigrant women's lives—Korean ethnic church and work—show how deeply Confucian ideology is entrenched in their everyday activities and, in turn, has molded their identity.

Modernization of Korea and Women's "Changing" Self. In 1876 Korea was forced out of isolation to open her harbors to Japan and a number of Western countries, and the Modernization Movement (Kaehwa Undong) was born (Y. C. Kim, 1986). Soon it became apparent that the participation of women who represented half of the entire population was essential to the new national agenda. However, Confucianism, which had thoroughly segregated and isolated women for centuries, posed an enormous obstacle in mobilizing this untapped resource. Thus, removal of the Confucian view of women became intimately tied to modernization as well as the women's movement in Korea (Kim, 1986).

When Christianity made its way into Korea at the turn of the century, it became a part of the effort to "enlighten" and "modernize" women (Kim, 1996). American missionaries established schools, hospitals, and orphanages and introduced modern ideas to a traditional Yi society. Schools set up by missionaries, for example, improved Korean women's status by offering a rare opportunity for girls to receive an education and produced female leaders who pioneered positions that had previously been off-limits to women. Caught up in the historical moment, then, Christianity was instrumental in

expanding women's involvement in the public sphere and generating new possibilities for women living in the modern era.

In fact, according to Cho (1986), "the Japanese colonial period (1920-1945) and the past two decades since 1961 are the epoch-making periods in the history of Korean industrialization and of women's labor force participation" (p. 151). However, in spite of an unprecedented economic expansion and a dramatic increase in women's participation in the labor force, women's roles and status did not change significantly. Analyzing the 1980 data on employment status of women and men, Cho (1986) points out that

> The increase in the absolute size and the female percentage in the labor force has been mainly due to the entrance of a large group of women into non-managerial positions and low paid or unpaid "women's" work. This includes production and clerical labor in manufacturing and service industries of the advanced corporate sector and agricultural family labor (p.168).

The selective incorporation of women into the labor market which masks or marginalizes women's economic contribution is not a uniquely Korean phenomenon. Marxist feminist scholars have argued that the reduced importance accorded to women's work under the pressures of commercialization and proto-industrialization is a central factor in the consolidation of patriarchy around the world (Connell, 1987). In Korea, the modernization and Westernization appear to have tempered gender inequality somewhat, but traditional ideologies legitimating the subordination of women and the dominance of men in the economic and social institutions persist in urban middle-class life.

Korean Immigrant Community and Christianity. In the early part of 1900, Christian missionaries were also actively involved in the first wave of Korean migration to the U.S. (Hurh & Kim, 1984). These early immigrants formed Christian churches which became the social center of Korean American community in the absence of other

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organizational structure to provide many social functions. After the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 abolished discriminatory quotas based on racial or national origin, a heavy influx of new Korean immigrants came to the U.S. and drastically altered the Korean American community. A rapid increase of new arrivals since 1965 has resulted in a rebirth of a new first generation in the Korean immigrant community, but Christian churches have remained the most important social and cultural center for Koreans in America. This is evident in looking at the data released from the 1985 National Bureau of Statistics which revealed that while only 21 percent of the national population is affiliated with Christianity in Korea, 70 to 80 percent of Korean immigrants are affiliated with Korean ethnic churches in the U.S. (Hurh & Kim, 1990).

Unlike the first Christian missionaries' attempt to enlighten individual Korean women, churches in the Korean immigrant community have tended to preserve and reinforce Korean traditional values. In fact, Kim (1996) states that women's roles and status in the church currently are similar to those they had been forced to assume under Confucianism during the Yi period. It is still very rare for women to hold any leadership positions within the church, and the only acceptable roles women are allowed to play are those of assistants to men. Thus, the Korean ethnic church as a social institution has only continued to validate the traditional image of women's subordination to men and self-sacrifice in caring for and serving others. It is questionable, however, whether the next generation of Korean American women, raised and educated in the U.S. with exposure to American individualism and independence, will continue to submit to the traditional image of "other-oriented, selfless self" or not.

Korean immigrant women and work in the U.S. Juggling two very different cultures and social situations, Korean immigrant women are faced with rapid changes and many contradictions and ambiguities in their lives. For instance, one study concentrating on the Chicago area found that although most post-1965 Korean American immigrant women expressed traditional gender role orientation, "virtually all of the young and middle-aged wives were working outside home" (Kim & Kim, 1998, p. 104). This is quite unusual in that in Korea women are typically expected to leave the work force once they are married in order to fulfill their traditional role of being full-time homemakers.

Interestingly, a study on predeparture employment orientation found that a high proportion of Korean wives (80%) expressed that they would be economically active in the United States even though they were full-time housewives prior to migration (Kim & Kim, 1998). These Korean women anticipated that they must work alongside of their husbands in America in order to achieve a lifestyle consistent with their preimmigration middle-class background. The actual labor force participation show 56 percent of married Korean immigrant women in the U.S. work outside the home, as opposed to only 20 percent in South Korea (Chang & Moon, 1998). A marked increased in female labor participation among immigrants is generally due to the fact that women's employment outside the home is indispensable for family survival. When men of color immigrate to the U.S., their economic contributions decline significantly and their wives' earnings are crucial in making up the income discrepancies (Espiritu, 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Kibria, 1993).

In order to overcome labor market barriers such as racial discrimination and underemployment, many Korean immigrants have engaged in small-businesses (Chang &

Moon, 1998). Because of limited capital and skills, most Korean American businesses tend to be concentrated in highly competitive, marginally profitable, and labor-intensive operations which generate profits directly from the family's labor and staying open long hours. A number of studies on Korean ethnic entrepreneurship found that women are crucial to starting and maintaining small family businesses because their availability and willingness to work long hours as unpaid workers are major factors in achieving economic success in America (Min, 1998; Chang & Moon, 1998).

Nevertheless, according to Lim (1997), the majority of Korean small-business couples interviewed regarded wives' employment as a responsibility for the family or a "system of coexistence" to secure food, shelter, clothes, and education for their children, rather than a direct expression of marital equality. Such a view of women and work arise from the Confucian womanly virtue, *hyonmo yangch'o*, which prescribes that a good wife and mother, as a partner in a household economy, should work diligently alongside her husband for the welfare of the whole family. The wife's hard work, then, is perceived as a duty to her family, rather than an expression of an individual right or accomplishment. Moreover, because of an ideology of family collectivism, Espiritu (1997) points out that

> most Asian American women, like other women of color, do not separate paid work and housework. Their work outside the home is an extension of their domestic responsibilities, as all family members—women, men, and children—pool their resources to ensure economic subsistence or to propel the family up the economic ladder (p. 10).

Therefore, although migration to the U.S. has resulted in the "shrinking gap" between the level of men's and women's relative control of societal resources, this shift did not lead to a radical transformation of women's consciousness or restructuring of gender relations in the home (Kibria, 1993). In fact, Lim (1997) indicates that "although

they [Korean immigrant wives] try to check their husbands' monopoly at home, they do not intend to subvert the traditional sense of marital hierarchy itself. They believe that the authority of men as family heads should remain unchallenged for the family order" (p. 40). Thus, Korean immigrant wives seem to be actively *limiting* their attempts to change unequal marital relations and are employing what Kandiyoti (1988) calls a "patriarchal bargain" to preserve the traditional family structure through their submissiveness and propriety in exchange for economic security and protection in a harsh, competitive new environment. Again, however, it is questionable whether the same strategy will be adopted by the next generation of Korean American women (i.e., 1.5 and 2nd) who have received their education in the U.S. mostly with professional aspirations and who can obtain greater social and economic opportunities than their first generation mothers before them.

Main Characters: Challenges for Korean American Women

Although Erikson (1959) was influential in introducing the concept of development throughout one's life span, he limited the task of identity formation to late adolescence and young adulthood stage. However, McAdams (1993) believes that Erikson's "subsequent developmental stages—'intimacy' and 'generativity'—are best understood as identity concerns" and only in the last stage, "ego integrity vs. despair," identity issues finally recede to the background (p. 95). Thus, he states that "once an individual realizes that he or she is responsible for defining the self, the issue of self-definition remains a preoccupation through most of the adult years" (pp. 95-96). Mahoney (1991) similarly suggests that personal identity is one of the core-ordering processes or basic themes which is at the heart of every person's lifelong efforts to

organize and reorganize their experiences. The formation and reformation of identity, then, is the central task of the adult years.

According to McAdams (1993), during the early adulthood (twenties and thirties), identity challenges us to construct a personal myth where the different aspects of our selves or the multiple social roles we assume in our daily life are consolidated and refined through the main characters or imagoes in our story. And, in the middle adulthood (forties and fifties), we need to revise our life story in ways that reconcile and integrate the conflict in our identities, giving us a sense of unity and purpose. Both of these tasks, I believe, are particularly challenging for Korean American women who must bring together two different, often conflicting worlds of values and lifestyles into one body, one identity, one story.

Creating main characters. Adults in their twenties and thirties must make provisional commitments and consolidate their roles within the social realms of family and work. However, McAdams (1993) indicates that work and family life began to split as a result of industrial revolution and urbanization in America during the nineteenth century. In turn, adults were forced to craft their identities to accommodate the dualism of modern life and develop two very different ways of being. For women, juggling the public world of work and the private world of family becomes especially problematic in their thirties as they start families and stereotypically adopt the caregiver role (Gutmann, 1987). For most Korean American women, the split between work in mainstream America and traditional Korean family life is even greater and fraught with many ambiguities and contradictions.

No matter how complex, McAdams (1993) states that all of us ultimately seek to be one thing—a single story for a single life—because "one cannot and must not be everything to everybody at every place and time" (p. 122). He goes on to suggest that the problem of simultaneously being "the many and the one" is resolved by creating a personal myth that contains a rich but finite source of characters (i.e., many characters, one story). He calls the characters that dominate our life stories *imagoes*, which offers a way to integrate various social roles and different aspects of our selves:

> Imagoes provide a narrative mechanism for accommodating the diversity of modern life. In seeking pattern and organization for identity, the person in the early adult years psychologically pulls together social roles and other divergent aspects of the self to form integrative imagoes. Central conflicts or dynamics in one's life may be represented and played out as conflicting and interacting imagoes, as main characters in any story interact to push forward the plot (p. 122).

Thus, life stories may have one dominant imago or many, but McAdams (1993) found that people most often have two central and conflicting imagoes in personal myth, notably agentic character (e.g., warrior, traveler, sage, maker) and communal character (e.g., caregiver, lover, friend, ritualist). This pattern of contrasting dual characters are evident in the legacy of two traditional images of Korean women—"warrior-like household priestess" and "other-oriented, selfless self" as discussed earlier. These images are embodied in first generation Korean immigrant women who work tirelessly and selflessly for their family both inside and outside the home in America. Because young adults fashion their imagoes on models provided by significant people in their lives (McAdams, 1993), the warrior-like, other-oriented, selfless Korean immigrant mothers are also likely to be personified, consciously or unconsciously, in their 1.5 and/or 2nd generation Korean American daughters' lives.

While Korean American women may have internalized their other-oriented, selfless warrior mothers, they also grew up in America watching a contrasting image portrayed in the media of an independent, assertive white professional woman who can hold her ground equally to any man. Because imagoes also personify cultural values and ideals at a given time and a given place (McAdams, 1993), the popular Western image of woman's individuality and equality have an equal, but opposite impact on the Korean American women's developing character. For the 1.5 and 2nd generation Korean American daughters who are frustrated with the traditional idea of women's subordination to men modeled and taught in the family and reinforced in the Korean ethnic church, the media portrayal of powerful and successful women provide a more attractive, viable model to emulate at least in their world of work. Therefore, many young Korean American women are faced with an extremely difficult task of pulling together at least two very different, conflicting social roles and aspects of themselves in the form of imagoes or main characters—their more "Americanized," agentic, public career side and their more "Koreanized," communal, private family side.

Integrating main characters. Juggling a multitude of different roles is so much part of modern life that a sociologist such as Erving Goffman contended that being well-adjusted is nothing more than choosing the appropriate behavioral performance for a given situation (cited in McAdams, 1993). In multicultural literature on acculturation, biculturality, which is currently conceptualized as a bidirectional and orthogonal relationship between the individual's culture of origin and the second culture, is considered to be the healthiest form of adjustment (LaFromboise, Coleman, Gerton, 1993). In other words, the latest view on biculturalism suggests that a well-adjusted

individual can alter his or her behavior to fit a particular social context without having to choose between two cultures.

Although this "alternating model" may be socially effective and an individual may appear on the surface to be well-rounded and adjusted, he or she may be too flexible to sustain any meaningful, cohesive self. Polkinghorne (1988) explains

> To play a social role is not the same as configuring one's life into a plot that is one's personal identity. Performing a social role is a way in which a person manages and animates his or her actions, but playing a character—of which there are many over a life span—represents only one of the episodes that make up the content of a life story.... But these various roles...all take on meaning from the perspective of the single adventure that is one person, as defined by the life plot (p. 153).

Therefore, in order to come to a unified, meaningful personal identity, an individual needs to synthesize and integrate diverse social roles in his or her life. McAdams (1993) similarly suggests that if we want our lives to be more meaningful than merely playing different roles, "we must find a way to bring the roles under the partial control of an organizing identity" (p. 126). In fact, he believes that integrating conflicting roles and imagoes in our lives is one of the important aspects of a good, mature personal myth.

Thus, moving beyond juggling roles, adults in the middle years must "confront conflict and ambivalence in their identities and reconcile mythical opposites in light of an envisioned ending of their own life stories" (McAdams, 1993, p. 197). We have seen how the contrasting traditional characters of "warrior-like household priestess" and "other-oriented, selfless self" have been fused to form Korean immigrant women's identities as other-oriented, selfless warrior mothers and wives who would do any and all things to improve economic security of their family in America. Because post-1965 immigrants have reshaped the Korean community in the U.S., it is a relatively young

ethnic group and most of its 1.5 and 2nd generation Korean American women are beginning to enter their young adult years and are faced with juggling numerous social roles in the dual cultural context. Hence, it is yet unknown how most of these 1.5 and 2nd generation Korean American young women will reconcile and integrate the contrasting dual characters of their agentic work side with their communal family side. However, in order to make meaning out of their seemingly contradictory bicultural existence, these Korean American women will need to create dynamic narratives that will render coherence to their personal identity if they are to succeed in their mythmaking effort.

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